ANNUAL REPORT



NORTHSTAR

CELEBRATING

30 YEARS

FY2026



OUR MISSION

At Northstar, we promote educational excellence and career opportunities for students with disabilities who have academic, physical or social challenges.

LETTER FROM OUR HEAD OF SCHOOL

Reflecting on my first year at Northstar, I have been awestruck by the Northstar community. Beginning this new chapter as your Head of School was both exciting and daunting, but I am so grateful to have been welcomed with open arms. It has been especially meaningful to join Northstar as we celebrated our 30th anniversary. To step into this new role during such an important milestone has given me an even deeper appreciation for the history, relationships, and traditions that have shaped our school.

This past year has been one of listening, learning, building relationships, and looking ahead. I have had the privilege of getting to know our students and celebrating their accomplishments. We had 16 incredible Academy graduates and 3 Career Center graduates. Our students continued to meet their academic goals, earn industry credentials, and learn important social skills.

I've been able to hear from families about their hopes and aspirations for their students. These experiences have helped shape my understanding of who we are as a community and the opportunities before us.



As we look toward *Igniting Our Imaginations* this upcoming school year, our focus remains clear: to provide an engaging, supportive, and inclusive learning environment in which every student can thrive. There is much to look forward to, and I am excited to continue this journey alongside you.

Thank you for welcoming me so generously during my first year at Northstar. I am honored to serve as your Head of School, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the years ahead.

Kind Regards,

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Head of School

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Asst. Head of School

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CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF



1996
Northstar Academy opens with 13 students at Epiphany Lutheran Church.



1995 - 2004
Founding Head of School Candace David, along with parents and pediatric professionals, begin planning a school dedicated to students with learning differences. She establishes Northstar onto our Shrader Road campus.

1997–1999
Rapid grown prompts a move to Shrader Road. Parents and volunteers transform former train cars into classrooms.



2004–2017
Under Head of School Dr. Pat West, Northstar launches kindergarten and an after school program. We began piloting a transition program, expanded extracurricular opportunities, and enhanced instructional practices.

2002
Northstar Academy's first graduating class.



2012–2013
Northstar adopts our specialized reading and math program

2014
Northstar Career Academy opens and becomes a Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) vendor

NAVIGATING THE FUTURE



2016
Northstar earns Virginia Association of Independent Schools (VAIS) accreditation

2019
Recognizing our need to grow, we began a feasibility study to start our Capital Campaign for a new campus

<u>2017 - 2025</u>
Crystal Trent becomes Northstar's third Head of School, leading strategic growth and a move onto the Nuckols Road campus



2022
Northstar's Nuckols Road campus was purchased after years of looking

2024
We broke ground on our Gym and Community Center building. Students signed one of the ceiling beams, leaving their mark on a building that will serve generations to come.



2025
Northstar's Gym and Community Center was opened in April, becoming a new community hub for our school



<u>2025</u>
Bethany Raffanello took the lead during our 30th Anniversary year, taking us into a new, exciting chapter of our school's history.



HOMECOMING

10 Seniors were crowned

300 Students, families and community supporters joined us

$4,000 Raised from sponsors to directly support student experiences during the school year.











SENIOR ESSAY

by Riley

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do."

In elementary school, I did not do great work as I would like to. I did not love what I did in class. Many times I did not understand what the teacher was teaching to the class. I knew how to do something but not a lot of things on my own. I had to teach myself whatever we were learning about at that time. Also I had to teach myself different ways to understand what the teacher was teaching. I got frustrated with myself when I thought I had the correct answer but it was an incorrect answer in front of the whole class.

I felt left out and felt different besides all the other students in the class. I thought I was going to learn the same way as the other students in the class. But I figured out that it took me longer to understand the work than the other students. Then one week of middle school made it clear that I needed a better place to learn. Then I visited Northstar for two days to see if I could understand the work better than in middle school. After that I went for a week and said "this seems like a good fit for me to learn on a new path".

At Northstar I have become more independent in my work and I don't always need someone beside me helping me in a way I did not understand. An accomplishment is how well I read now compared to middle school. I can also write different paragraphs on the same subject and make it all go smoothly together. Also there are not very loud classes compared to elementary school. **I can talk to my friends more and not be shy just talking to them**.

I have seen a difference in myself from the beginning of 6th grade to my senior year. Now I can understand what the teacher is teaching about in classes I take here at Northstar.

I enjoyed participating in Homecoming and the Talent show. My favorite memory was doing my final card trick this year. I knew that it would be a mystery in finding those four tricky kings and the four aces.



Thank you all of you for helping me achieve my goals that I wanted to reach during my learning journey. As I mentioned earlier, "the only way to do great work is to love what you do." Now I love what I do here at Northstar.







INNAUGURAL FIELD DAY

19 volunteers

10 game stations

1 winner: the **Blue Team**!





NORTHSTAR IN NUMBERS

In our 2025 - 2026 school year, together we achieved:

Over **$500,000** in scholarships awarded

13 Counties Served

125 Students

9 Disability Categories

155 Volunteers

1,100 Volunteer Hours

396 Donors

$2,771,453 Raised

Data is collected on student growth in academic and social skills, and create a tailored program with unique metrics of success based on individual students' goals and needs.

98.8% improved their **reading** goals

97.4% improved on their **writing** goals

97.5% improved their **math** goals

97.7% made improvements on **social skills** goals*

96.2% made improvements on **behavior** goals



*includes executive function skills, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships

THE ILLUMINATION GALA

Held on March 20, 2026, The Illumination Gala raised over $172,000 in direct support of our students.








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Mary and Lem Doss

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NAVIGATOR AWARDS

ENDURING SUPPORT: **LEM, MARY, AND ROBERT DOSS**



The Doss Family has been an integral part of the Northstar family since Robert's enrollment in 2012. From the very beginning, they believed deeply in Northstar's mission and generously poured their hearts into supporting the school community.

Mary supported the development and early stages of Northstar's Career Center, and was instrumental in starting the welding component of our Construction and Maintenance program.

Lem provided steadfast leadership as Chairman of the Board and as a Board Member during our Capital Campaign, championing the school's growth and expansion onto our new campus. Since graduation, Robert has remained one of our most active and engaged alumni. He can often be found at alumni gatherings and nearly every major school event throughout the year.

OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP: **VIRGINIA ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL AUTHORITY**



The team at Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority, coordinated by Sarah Tyler, has championed Northstar students in the Career Center's Business Technology class for three years.

Through their team's dedication, they've launched an inclusion program, welcoming interns with disabilities and creating opportunities for others to gain meaningful workplace experience. Our partnership has helped model a truly inclusive workplace, and shows the lasting impact on both our students and the broader community.









CAREER CENTER



45 Students Served

6 Family Education Nights

20 Credentials Earned

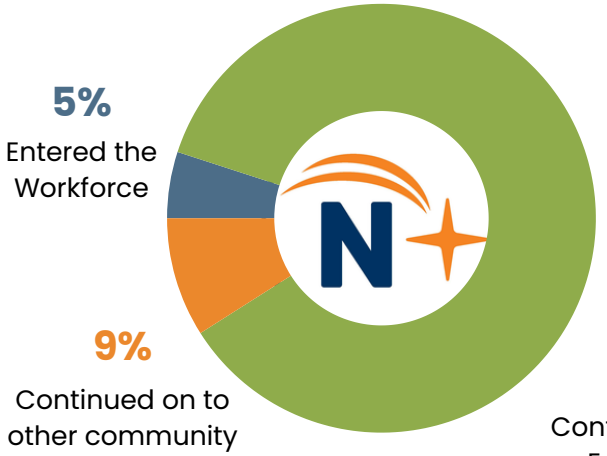
83% Improved on student transition goals**

58 Community Partnerships





100% of exiting students left with a plan in place



5% Entered the Workforce

9% Continued on to other community experiences

86% Continued their Education







**skills related to preparing for postsecondary education, employment, and life services

A SPECIAL TRADITION



Variety is the spice of life — and at Northstar, nothing captures that spirit quite like **Minimester**. This beloved annual tradition takes place the week before Spring Break. It gives students a chance to step away from their usual routines and dive into something new and exciting.

Each year, both teachers and students eagerly anticipate this unique week. **Traditional classroom instruction pauses as students explore a wide range of enrichment activities**. What makes this program especially meaningful is that the classes are selected based on student and faculty passions and interests. From creative pursuits to physical activities, there's something for everyone.

The 2026 Minimester offerings included exciting topic such as an introduction to Arabic, Dungeons & Dragons, physical fitness/yoga, puzzle-solving, and more. "I took pictures of the different classes doing different stuff so they were documented for the yearbook," said Hamza, 10th grade. Classes fill quickly and are offered on a first-come, first-served basis, which adds to the buzz and anticipation leading up to the week. Under the guidance of their teachers, **students are encouraged to try new things, collaborate with peers, and build confidence in a fun, low-pressure setting**.

Minimester is more than just a break from routine. It's an opportunity to foster curiosity in a different environment and grow during nontraditional instruction. Students not only learn new skills but also strengthen connections with classmates and staff.



Designed with every learner in mind, Minimester reflects Northstar's commitment to creating enriching experiences for students. With its ever-changing lineup of classes and focus on exploration, Minimester continues to be a highlight of the Northstar calendar and an inspiring reminder that learning can happen anywhere.

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Thank you to all those who supported us between July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026.

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FERNANDO'S STORY

By Delma

When I first found Northstar for my son, Fernando, I wasn't sure how we would make it work. The tuition felt overwhelming, and the commute was long. But we were out of options, and I was holding onto hope that maybe—just maybe—this place would be different.

Fernando had struggled in other schools. He barely spoke, kept to himself, and never quite fit anywhere. **I'll never forget his first week at Northstar**. Every day, I waited for my phone to ring. I was certain I would get a call asking me to come pick him up, that something wasn't working, that this would be like all the other times.

But the call never came. And slowly, that silence became something else: **relief**.

For the first time, my son was okay. At Northstar, Fernando found teachers who understood him and a community that accepted him. Little by little, he began to open up. He started talking more. He made friends for the first time. He began to believe in himself.

Northstar truly is the "village" so many parents of children with special needs are hoping for, the place where you finally feel like you're not alone. I have personally witnessed how every student at Northstar is treated with the same dignity, kindness, and support they all need and deserve. It's not just about my child, **it's about all of them being seen, valued, and cared for in a way that is so rare**.



Today, Fernando is excited about his future and hopes to work with animals one day. As his mom, I can tell you that there was a time I wasn't sure what his future would look like. Now, it feels full of possibility.







GRADUATION

16 Academy Graduates

44 earned Career Center program certificates

---

2 Advanced Studies Diplomas awarded

5 Standard Diplomas awarded

9 Applied Studies Diplomas awarded





VOLUNTEERS

Thank you to everyone who has given their time to support Northstar and our students.
Volunteers contributed **1,100 hours** in service to our school.







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Teona White
Blaine Wood
Yvonne Wu
Addy Yocum
Ayden Young
Shay Young
Hasan Zahra
Jamie Zannette
Kaily Zhang



FRIENDLY RIVALRY

The energy was high and the smiles were even bigger at Northstar's students vs. teachers basketball game - **an event that perfectly captured the spirit of fun, teamwork, and inclusion**. While the game was all about friendly competition, it also gave students a chance to sharpen their skills, build confidence, and work together.

This beloved tradition, once a staple for the club basketball team, had been on pause during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the opening of the new gymnasium, the game made a triumphant return, bringing with it a renewed sense of excitement and community. Students and teachers went head-to-head on the court, each team determined to come out on top, but **the true victory was in the shared experience and joy of participation**.

The event drew an enthusiastic crowd of parents, volunteers, community members, and fellow students. The stands were filled with handmade signs of encouragement, cheers, and laughter, creating an atmosphere that celebrated every player. During intermission, the cheer team grabbed their pompoms and marched onto the floor to perform for their fellow students. It was a **powerful reminder of how sports can unite a community** and highlight the importance of traditional school experiences while maintaining accommodations for individuals of all ability levels.

Coached by P.E. teacher Ms. Pigg and Coach Mario, the students ultimately defeated the teachers in a 14 – 10 final score. "The student's teamwork really shined. It got them all those extra baskets and let them pull ahead," commented Mrs. Webb, who played for the teacher team. "I'm ready for next year's rematch."



Northstar empowers students to value their diverse abilities, chart a successful course for their lives, and create their own futures. We cultivate communities where people of all abilities thrive.

OUR VISION

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WE SEE ABILITY



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804-747-1003

11501 Nuckols Road, Glen Allen, VA 23059